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SUBJECT: IRAQI PARTICIPANTS IN US-ARAB ECONOMIC FORUM FEEL ISOLATED

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED, PROTECT ACCORDINGLY

1.(U) SUMMARY: Iraqi participants in the US-Arab Economic Forum (USAECF) told Poloff that they felt isolated from the other participants at the conference, held in Houston from June 26 to 28. Although they were grateful for the opportunity to participate and felt that they made some valuable connections, they were disappointed by the pessimism they encountered during discussions of projects in Iraq. On the contrary, they were very upbeat about their consultations and training sessions in Washington, DC, and sent heartfelt thanks to Amb. Steven Steiner, Deborah Emmert, and everyone in the G/IWI office who helped to plan their trip. END SUMMARY.

USAEF - "Fighting Stereotypes"

2.(SBU) Telba Attia Kadoori and Jenan Mubarak, two of post's three nominees for the USAEF conference met with Poloff on July 20 to discuss their trip to the United States. (NOTE: The third participant, Dhuha Rouhi, did not return to Iraq and is currently staying in Jordan indefinitely. END NOTE.) They said that the USAEF conference had been sponsored by Saudi Arabia and Qatar, "which was obvious from the focus" according to Mubarak. Kadoori described some innovative agricultural ideas she had for developing the desert area between Anbar and Nineva provinces, some of which are being used in the deserts of Saudi Arabia. However, she lamented that several participants had dismissed these projects as "impossible," preferring instead to focus on the success of the Saudi experiment.

¶3. (SBU) The women commented that many of the other participants seemed unaware that there were delegates from Iraq at the conference, and they often found themselves in conversations about the "ethnic violence" engulfing Iraq, and the impossibility of trade with or investment in that war-torn country. As a result, they spent much of their time "fighting stereotypes" and explaining political realities and economic possibilities province by province.

¶4. (SBU) Despite the difficulties, both women were happy with the opportunity to network and have projects they look forward to following up. Kadoori met some Houston businessmen interested in developing hotels and other tourist-oriented projects in the more stable areas of Iraq, as well as agro-business types interested in trading soy for dates. Mubarak, who previously worked as a fashion designer in Lebanon, reported that Sheikha Hessa Al-Sabah of the Arab Women's Council invited her to participate in a fashion show in the fall, where they will continue a discussion on exporting Iraqi handicrafts, among other things.

Washington DC Consultations "Excellent!"

¶ 15. (U) When discussion shifted to the consultation and training sessions organized by G/IWI, the women visibly brightened. They were clearly energized by their experiences in Washington, and were full of new and creative ideas. In fact, Mubarak had developed at least one viable project idea from each meeting she had in Washington, and was already networking both in the US and Iraq to move forward on several. Among her ideas is an email translation service, which will help employ Iraqi women who otherwise may not be able to work outside the home due to security concerns. Kadoori is also working on a proposal to form small collective farming groups for rural women. Both women were grateful to the G/IWI office for organizing their visit, which they declared "absolutely excellent!"

¶ 16. (U) The women concluded that the most valuable and relevant sessions were the workshop on tenders, presented by the Department of the Army, and the discussion on microfinance at the World Bank. They agreed that the session with America's Development Foundation (ADF) was their least favorite, although they admitted that they had both had negative experiences with ADF in Iraq that colored their opinion.

¶ 17. (U) Post will continue to follow up with Kadoori and Mubarak as they pursue their projects, and will report on developments as they occur. Post thanks G/IWI for its continued commitment to the women of Iraq.

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